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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 07 MINSK 000758

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SUBJECT: IISEPS Polling: Lukashenko Still Enjoys Popular Support

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¶1. SUMMARY: On July 10, Director of the independent polling service IISEPS Oleg Manaev gave Ambassador the results of two opinion surveys conducted in June. Lukashenko maintains a high support rating, with 55 percent of those polled claiming they would vote for Lukashenko again should elections be held tomorrow. His closest competitor, opposition coalition candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich, comes in a distant second with only 13 percent. The majority of respondents (70 percent) believe there should be a dialogue between the opposition and GOB, but 41 percent blame the opposition and West for the lack of dialogue and only 30 percent blame the authorities. According to the surveys, 89 percent of those polled get their news from Belarusian TV and less than 5 percent listen to foreign radio broadcasts from Poland and Lithuania. Only 14 percent of respondents use the internet with much frequency, but of those who use do use the internet, the most popular online news sites include TUT.by, Radio Liberty, and other independent news sites. End Summary.

¶2. Manaev conducted two opinion surveys in June. During the first survey (June I), carried out on June 2-12, 1509 people were interviewed. The second survey (June II), was conducted on June 15-25 and included 1505 people. Below are highlights of the polls.

Support For Lukashenko Still High

¶3. According to IISEPS' June I polling, 21.4 percent of respondents consider Belarus a relatively democratic country, whereas 27.3 percent consider it more of a dictatorship. However, 64.6 percent of those polled view Lukashenko's third term as president legitimate and legal. In fact, support for Lukashenko still runs much higher than for his nearest adversary, Milinkevich.

Results of voting at the Presidential Election (%) according to IISEPS 2006 polling compared to the Central Election Committee's (CEC) official data:

|             | CEC  | Feb  | March | April | June I | June II |
|-------------|------|------|-------|-------|--------|---------|
|             | ---  | ---  | ----- | ----- | -----  | -----   |
| Lukashenko  | 83.0 | 64.7 | 64.9  | 63.1  | 63.1   | 61.9    |
| Milinkevich | 6.1  | 18.3 | 21.4  | 18.8  | 20.2   | 19.9    |
| Gaidukevich | 3.5  | 5.0  | 2.2   | 5.2   | 4.4    | 3.3     |
| Kozulin     | 2.2  | 7.0  | 5.0   | 7.3   | 5.5    | 5.9     |
| Against all | 5.2  | 5.0  | 6.4   | 5.5   | 6.8    | 9.0     |

"If elections were held again tomorrow, who would you vote for?"

| Answer     | June I  | June II |
|------------|---------|---------|
|            | -----   | -----   |
| Lukashenko | 54.7(%) | 54.3    |

|             |      |      |
|-------------|------|------|
| Milinkevich | 13.7 | 13.6 |
| Kozulin     | 2.8  | 3.7  |
| Gaidukevich | 2.7  | ---  |
| No answer   | 22.3 | ---  |

"Which of the below political figures more closely represents your ideal of a politician?" (June I)

|            | %    |
|------------|------|
|            | ---- |
| Lukashenko | 41.4 |
| Putin      | 29.4 |
| Blair      | 5.1  |
| Bush       | 4.2  |
| Castro     | 3.2  |
| Nazarbaev  | 2.2  |
| Yushenko   | 2.0  |

"In your opinion, has Lukashenko been successful at solving the following problems that the country faces?" (June I)

|                                            | Yes     | No   |
|--------------------------------------------|---------|------|
|                                            | ----    | ---- |
| Maintaining stability in society           | 70.0(%) | 24.8 |
| Raising the economy and welfare            | 55.6    | 36.1 |
| Protecting social justice                  | 42.5    | 45.5 |
| Battling corruption                        | 41.7    | 47.7 |
| Improving Belarus' international status    | 41.0    | 47.5 |
| Protecting democracy and political freedom | 37.6    | 47.9 |
| Battling bureaucracy                       | 34.8    | 52.3 |

"Are you satisfied with the way Lukashenko has ran the country in the last 12 years?" (June I)

|                        | %    |
|------------------------|------|
|                        | ---- |
| Completely satisfied   | 38.5 |
| Somewhat satisfied     | 29.8 |
| Somewhat not satisfied | 9.1  |

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Not at all satisfied 19.7

"In your opinion, whose interests does Lukashenko serve?" (More than one answer) (June I)

|                                                   | %    |
|---------------------------------------------------|------|
|                                                   | ---- |
| Pensioners                                        | 40.7 |
| Presidential hierarchy                            | 39.7 |
| Leaders of government businesses/collective farms | 33.3 |
| People like yourself                              | 23.9 |
| Youth                                             | 21.3 |

"On a scale from one to ten, in your opinion, where is Belarus located?" ('1' representing complete democracy and '10' representing a true dictatorship)(June I)

| Scale | %    |
|-------|------|
|       | ---- |
| 1     | 5.3  |
| 2     | 6.0  |
| 3     | 10.1 |
| 4     | 9.4  |
| 5     | 14.3 |
| 6     | 10.7 |
| 7     | 11.7 |
| 8     | 10.2 |
| 9     | 7.3  |
| 10    | 9.8  |

14. Lukashenko also has the majority of Belarusians' trust, coming only in second to the Orthodox Church:

"Do you trust the following government and public institutions?" (June I)

| Yes | No |
|-----|----|
|-----|----|

|                              |         |      |
|------------------------------|---------|------|
|                              | ----    | ---- |
| Orthodox Church              | 66.5(%) | 22.4 |
| President                    | 60.8    | 30.6 |
| Government media             | 57.0    | 35.0 |
| Army                         | 51.2    | 36.0 |
| Government                   | 47.7    | 40.1 |
| Courts                       | 44.9    | 42.5 |
| KGB                          | 37.9    | 45.7 |
| Independent media            | 37.0    | 47.3 |
| Police                       | 38.4    | 50.2 |
| Local executive committees   | 36.7    | 50.5 |
| Local soviets                | 36.5    | 50.3 |
| International organizations  | 30.8    | 49.3 |
| Protestant Church            | 16.6    | 58.4 |
| Opposition political parties | 15.5    | 65.6 |

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Change Possible?  
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15. The majority of respondents supports Lukashenko and is satisfied with his rule. However, the majority of those polled admitted that citizens fear expressing their opinions in public and commented on the lack of dialogue between the opposition and GOB. Also noteworthy is that 25 percent of respondents believe a change in leadership could occur only if initiated by the authorities and not as much by the people or the opposition.

"What do you think about Belarusians' readiness to express their political opinions?"

|                    |         |         |
|--------------------|---------|---------|
|                    | June I  | June II |
|                    | -----   | -----   |
| No one afraid      | 18.6(%) | 24.6    |
| Few people afraid  | 28.5    | 21.0    |
| Many people afraid | 40.2    | 33.6    |
| All afraid         | 7.9     | 12.9    |

"Should there be a dialogue between the opposition and government?"  
(June I)

|     |      |
|-----|------|
|     | %    |
|     | ---- |
| Yes | 70.9 |
| No  | 17.3 |

"Do you think a dialogue exists between the opposition and government?" (June I)

|     |      |
|-----|------|
| No  | 66.2 |
| Yes | 16.7 |

"If you think a dialogue does not exist, then who is to blame (more than one answer)?" (June I)

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|             |      |
|-------------|------|
| Authorities | 30.2 |
| Opposition  | 25.9 |
| The West    | 15.0 |
| Russia      | 1.9  |
| No answer   | 16.1 |

"Would you like to see a change in leadership happen?" (June I)

|              |      |
|--------------|------|
| Yes          | 38.9 |
| No           | 29.4 |
| I don't care | 16.6 |
| No answer    | 15.1 |

"In your opinion, is it possible to have a complete internal and national leadership change in Belarus in the next five years?"  
(June I)

|               |      |
|---------------|------|
| Very possible | 31.8 |
| Doubtful      | 43.9 |
| Not possible  | 14.6 |

"If you believe that a change is possible, who would initiate the change?" (more than one answer)(June I)

|                |      |
|----------------|------|
| Authorities    | 25.6 |
| The people     | 19.2 |
| The West       | 13.9 |
| The opposition | 11.4 |
| Russia         | 11.1 |

"Do you think human rights are observed in Belarus?"

|                   |      |
|-------------------|------|
| Yes               | 24.9 |
| Yes, more or less | 36.1 |
| No, more or less  | 20.0 |
| No                | 14.3 |

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Information  
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16. Belarusian state media and Russian media dominate Belarusians' access to information. Only a miniscule number listens to external radio broadcasts and few read online news sources.

"What TV channels do you watch?"

|                              | June I  | June II |
|------------------------------|---------|---------|
|                              | -----   | -----   |
| Russian TV (ORT, NTV, etc.)  | 91.2(%) | 83.6    |
| Belarusian TV (BT, STV, ONT) | 89.6    | 89.2    |
| Local TV                     | 47.8    | 38.4    |
| Cable TV                     | 37.5    | 31.5    |
| Russian EuroNews             | 18.2    | 12.7    |
| Satellite TV                 | 13.9    | 15.8    |
| Polish TV                    | 9.4     | 11.8    |
| Weekly RTVI                  | 7.8     | 6.3     |

"Not long ago, radio stations in other countries began broadcasting programming (in Russian and Belarusian) to Belarus. Do you listen to these broadcasts?"

|                               | June I |      | June II |      |
|-------------------------------|--------|------|---------|------|
|                               | Yes    | No   | Yes     | No   |
|                               | ----   | ---- | ----    | ---- |
| Euroradio (Warsaw)            | 4.8(%) | 94.4 | 3.8     | 93.8 |
| Radia Ratsia (Belyastok)      | 4.4    | 94.8 | 2.5     | 95.3 |
| Poloniya (Warsaw)             | 3.6    | 95.6 | 3.0     | 94.7 |
| German Wave (Bonn)            | 3.3    | 96.0 | 2.9     | 94.5 |
| Baltiskaya Khavalya (Vilnius) | 2.0    | 96.8 | 1.7     | 95.8 |

"Do you use the internet?"

|                              | June I | June II |
|------------------------------|--------|---------|
|                              | -----  | -----   |
| Yes, daily                   | 5.1(%) | 4.1     |
| Yes, several times per week  | 9.6    | 7.6     |
| Yes, several times per month | 8.4    | 6.5     |
| Yes, several times per year  | 4.6    | 3.7     |
| No                           | 67.8   | 73.7    |

"If you do use the internet, what Belarusian information sites do you visit the most? (more than one answer)"

|                                     |      |     |
|-------------------------------------|------|-----|
| TUT.BY                              | 16.7 | 6.7 |
| Independent media sites (i.e., BDG) | 4.6  | 0.3 |
| Radio Liberty                       | 4.5  | 0.3 |
| Government media (i.e., Respublika) | 3.2  | 0.3 |
| Interfax                            | 2.6  | 0.5 |
| Charter 97                          | 2.6  | 0.4 |

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|         |     |     |
|---------|-----|-----|
| Belapan | 2.1 | 0.4 |
| Vyasna  | 0.9 | 0.1 |

"In the last year, have you--via media, leaflets, word of mouth--seen or heard the results of independent polling surveys in Belarus?"

|     | June I  | June II |
|-----|---------|---------|
|     | -----   | -----   |
| No  | 64.1(%) | 72.2    |
| Yes | 31.0    | 23.8    |

"Have you ever received the publication 'Belaruski Vyestnik' with results from public opinion surveys conducted not long ago by independent sociologists?"

|                                       | %    |
|---------------------------------------|------|
|                                       | ---- |
| Yes, I read the publication           | 9.6  |
| No, I never received this publication | 88.5 |

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Russia Preferred over EU  
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17. The majority of those polled prefer a union with Russia over closer integration with the EU, but the respondents revealed mixed feelings on Russia's interests in Belarus. On the one hand, they seek a closer integration with Russia and prefer Lukashenko as President of the Union, but on the other hand 65 percent fear their eastern neighbor intends to deprive Belarus of its independence and, should this ever happen, would not want Lukashenko to rule over the newly created nation.

"If a referendum were held now on Belarus' accession to the EU and you were able to vote 'for,' 'against,' or 'abstain,' how would you vote?" (June I)

| Answer  | %    |
|---------|------|
| -----   | ---- |
| For     | 49.2 |
| Against | 31.5 |
| Abstain | 18.5 |

"If you were to chose between a union with Russia or entry into the EU, what would you chose?"

|                   | June I  | June II |
|-------------------|---------|---------|
|                   | -----   | -----   |
| Union with Russia | 56.5(%) | 52.3    |
| EU accession      | 29.2    | 29.6    |

"It is likely that soon Belarus and Russia will hold a referendum on the Constitutional Act, which would open the way for closer integration of both governments. How would you vote?"

|                                        | June I  | June II |
|----------------------------------------|---------|---------|
|                                        | -----   | -----   |
| For the Act and closer integration     | 35.1(%) | 34.7    |
| Against the Act and closer integration | 15.2    | 17.7    |
| Will not participate                   | 9.5     | 11.3    |
| Depends on the circumstances           | 35.3    | 29.4    |
| No answer                              | 4.9     | 6.9     |

"If there were to be a referendum tomorrow on Belarus and Russia becoming one, how would you vote?"

|         | June I  | June II |
|---------|---------|---------|
|         | -----   | -----   |
| For     | 44.9(%) | 42.0    |
| Against | 28.9    | 37.6    |

"What is the best scenario mutual relationship for Belarus and Russia?"

|                                                | June I  | June II |
|------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|
|                                                | -----   | -----   |
| Union of independent governments               | 42.7(%) | 45.1    |
| Neighbory relations of independent governments | 36.5    | 30.9    |
| Formation of one government                    | 19.0    | 21.1    |

"If there was to be a presidential position [of the Russia-Belarus Union], who would you vote for to fulfill the position?"

|            | June I  | June II |
|------------|---------|---------|
|            | -----   | -----   |
| Lukashenko | 39.3(%) | 45.1    |

|             |      |      |
|-------------|------|------|
| Putin       | 24.2 | 24.7 |
| Milinkevich | 2.2  | 1.9  |
| No answer   | 29.0 | 23.9 |

"Some people in Belarus and in Russia believe it would be better

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for both countries if they become one and the union's leader became Lukashenko. How do you feel?" (June I)

|                               | %    |
|-------------------------------|------|
|                               | ---- |
| Would not want that to happen | 38.4 |
| Would want that to happen     | 35.9 |
| I do not care                 | 17.0 |

"In your opinion, if Belarus became part of Russia, would it have a positive or negative effect on the lives of Belarus' population?" (June II)

|           | %    |
|-----------|------|
|           | ---- |
| Positive  | 32.4 |
| Negative  | 33.7 |
| No effect | 19.5 |

The Belarusian and Russian governments are holding negotiations on the introduction of the Russian ruble in Belarus. In your opinion, should the Russian ruble be introduced in Belarus? (June II)

|     |      |
|-----|------|
| No  | 58.1 |
| Yes | 30.3 |

#### ----- International Relations -----

18. The following results are likely a byproduct of the GOB's successful propaganda campaign against perceived enemies of Belarus. Forty-five percent of June I respondents blame the EU and U.S. of violating international norms in internal and external politics, whereas only 13.2 percent blame Belarus. Russia, of course, is Belarus' closest friend and continues to get high support ratings from respondents. However, many respondents supported the EU [and U.S.] asset freezes of GOB officials:

"Not long ago, the EU froze bank accounts in the EU belonging to 36 high-ranking Belarusian officials in Lukashenko's administration. Some consider this move justified, others do not. What do you think?" (June I)

|               | %    |
|---------------|------|
|               | ---- |
| Justified     | 42.2 |
| Not justified | 34.5 |
| No answer     | 23.3 |

"How do you rate the political attitude of neighboring countries towards Belarus?" (June I)

|           | Positive | Negative |
|-----------|----------|----------|
|           | -----    | -----    |
| Russia    | 67.6(%)  | 14.4     |
| Ukraine   | 31.5     | 32.1     |
| Poland    | 23.1     | 38.6     |
| Lithuania | 19.6     | 37.4     |
| Latvia    | 17.8     | 37.6     |

"In your opinion, what type of world influence does Russia, the U.S., and Belarus have?" (June II)

|                 | Belarus | Russia | U.S. |
|-----------------|---------|--------|------|
|                 | -----   | -----  | ---- |
| Positive        | 43.5(%) | 68.3   | 26.1 |
| Negative        | 11.4    | 9.5    | 52.0 |
| Not significant | 38.3    | 11.7   | 8.3  |

"And what type of influence, in your opinion, does Russia and the

U.S. exert on Belarus?" (June II)

|                 | Russia | U.S. |
|-----------------|--------|------|
|                 | -----  | ---- |
| Positive        | 61.6   | 20.6 |
| Negative        | 18.2   | 49.8 |
| Not significant | 10.7   | 18.4 |

"In your opinion, has Russia, the U.S., and Belarus in the last few years considered the needs of its own citizens?" (June II)

|               | Belarus | Russia | U.S. |
|---------------|---------|--------|------|
|               | -----   | -----  | ---- |
| Yes           | 51.3    | 46.2   | 18.6 |
| No            | 17.5    | 10.9   | 19.7 |
| No difference | 23.4    | 24.5   | 26.7 |

"What type of opinion do you have about Presidents Putin, Bush, and Lukashenko?" (June II)

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|            | Positive | Negative |
|------------|----------|----------|
|            | -----    | -----    |
| Bush       | 27.3     | 57.4     |
| Lukashenko | 62.6     | 28.2     |
| Putin      | 74.1     | 13.6     |

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Energy  
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19. Support for Russia turns sour, however, when respondents were asked about threats of Russian gas price increases.

"The media often discusses that beginning in 2007, Belarus will have to pay world prices for Russian gas. Do you believe this?" (June I)

|           | %    |
|-----------|------|
|           | ---- |
| Yes       | 60.6 |
| No        | 28.0 |
| No answer | 11.4 |

"If you said yes, then in your opinion, why would this happen?" (more than one answer) (June I)

|                                                                                  | %    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
|                                                                                  | ---- |
| GAZPROM is a commercial structure going bankrupt making an exception for Belarus | 37.9 |
| Putin is using GAZPROM to pressure Lukashenko into Union integration             | 30.2 |
| Putin is fulfilling the West's demands to remove Lukashenko from power           | 8.6  |
| No answer                                                                        | 15.7 |

"The leadership of GAZPROM has announced several times that in 2007, Belarus will pay European prices for gas, meaning five times more than it does today. Which of the following conclusions do you agree with?" (June II)

|                                                       | %    |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------|
|                                                       | ---- |
| It will not affect Belarusian-Russian relations       | 22.7 |
| It will result in worsening relations                 | 42.0 |
| It means the end of the Union government              | 16.4 |
| Belarus will be forced to reorient itself to the West | 7.2  |

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Standard of Living: Still Woes, But Belarus On Right Path  
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10. Despite Lukashenko's repeated statements that the GOB's priority is to increase the population's standard of living, it appears that many of these problems are not solved and top the respondents' list of concerns. However, the majority continues to believe that Belarus is developing on the right path.

"What are the most burning problems for the country and its citizens?" (more than one answer)(June II)

| Answer<br>-----                  | %<br>----- |
|----------------------------------|------------|
| Price increases                  | 60.1       |
| Unemployment                     | 37.0       |
| Corruption, bribery              | 27.6       |
| Chernobyl consequences           | 25.5       |
| Crime                            | 23.2       |
| Human right violations           | 22.1       |
| Absence of order, laws           | 22.1       |
| Receding population              | 21.9       |
| Impoverished population          | 19.5       |
| Production decrease              | 18.7       |
| Threats from the West            | 18.2       |
| Belarus' international isolation | 14.4       |
| Decline of national culture      | 10.8       |
| Losing Belarus' independence     | 8.3        |
| Dissent in society               | 7.3        |

"What is the average salary (including wages, pensions, welfare, etc.) that a member of your family typically receives?"

|                      | June I<br>----- | June II<br>----- |
|----------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Below USD 79         | 18.3(%)         | 15.9             |
| USD 79 - 116         | 42.1            | 42.0             |
| USD 116 - 232        | 32.0            | 33.7             |
| Greater than USD 232 | 7.0             | 7.7              |
| Average Salary       | USD 92          | USD 132          |

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"What percent of your family's income is spent on food and housing services?" (June II)

|               | %<br>----- |
|---------------|------------|
| Less than 10% | 2.7        |
| 10-30%        | 11.5       |
| 30-50%        | 37.6       |
| 50-80%        | 34.0       |
| Over 80%      | 7.4        |

"What items are you able to purchase? (more than one answer)(June II)

|                                                              | %<br>----- |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Sometimes not enough money for simple food and cheap clothes | 14.9       |
| Only necessary food and clothes                              | 55.1       |
| Quality and various food and good clothes                    | 25.6       |
| Any food and clothing, whatever I want                       | 5.0        |
| Basic household appliances (TV, refrigerator, etc.)          | 39.9       |
| Modern appliances and technology (DVD players, etc.)         | 11.0       |
| Newest high-end appliances and technology                    | 1.4        |
| Inexpensive used car                                         | 22.9       |
| New car                                                      | 1.2        |
| Cannot buy new apartment, although needed                    | 28.9       |
| Apartment, but using life savings or loan                    | 6.2        |
| Real-estate (for vacation, investment)                       | 0.8        |

"In your opinion, is your country developing on the right or wrong course?"

|              | June I<br>----- | June II<br>----- |
|--------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Right course | 61.4(%)         | 56.9             |
| Wrong course | 26.4            | 31.0             |

"How has your life and that of your family changed since 1994?" (June II)

|                        | %<br>----- |
|------------------------|------------|
| Changed for the better | 51.2       |



|                |      |
|----------------|------|
| Did not change | 27.1 |
| Got worse      | 17.4 |

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Comment  
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¶11. The respondents' positive assessment of Lukashenko, his economic "stability", and the negative opinions of the West are likely the result of the GOB's successful propaganda campaign and the general lack of access to (and perhaps lack of interest in) objective information. Internet usage is increasing, but slowly, and foreign radio broadcasts have failed to reach the majority of Belarusians. Nonetheless, some of the respondents' opinions indicate that they are aware of the shortfalls in their government and do not believe everything the state media reports. Meanwhile, Belarusians' generally positive opinion of Russia could quickly change, as Belarusians are increasingly concerned about Russia's possible encroachment on Belarus' sovereignty and its willingness to use gas prices as a political lever.

KROL